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# Crime Scene Sketching and Digital Photography

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## CRIME SCENE SKETCHING

Before the jury hears testimony about the conditions at a crime scene, before blood evidence is collected for DNA analysis, before latent fingerprint development begins, even before the area around a body is combed for clues, the crime scene is documented through **sketching** and **photography**.

There are two phases to crime scene sketching: the **rough sketch** and the **finished sketch**. The most common view used in crime scene sketches is the bird's-eye view. This is the view of the scene as from directly above, which does not include the appearance or contents of vertical surfaces like walls or cabinets. An elevation is the view from the side and is always accompanied by the cardinal direction. For example, a particular view may be "the elevation of the north wall of the living room, Smith residence, 222 Mockingbird Lane, 1 January 2015." The address, date and your initials must be on each sketch, in addition to any other chain-of-custody documentation required by your instructor.

During the initial evaluation of the scene, an investigator must select two points of reference like "the north exterior wall" or a window or "the main entry door." These must be immovable, permanent features of the building or landscape. To generate a rough sketch, the investigator measures the dimensions of the space and uses these points to accurately characterize the contents of the scene. Major items of interest, like a body or a weapon, are located in reference to these points. For example, the investigator may select the south exterior wall of a home and the back door, located in the kitchen, as the two points of reference in a crime scene focused on the kitchen and the basement stairs. The sketch should begin with the dimensions of the room(s) involved and the footprint of the dwelling, as well as the orientation of the building to due north, as it would appear on a map. The property

surrounding the building, like the distance to a road, other buildings, or vehicles, may also be relevant to the investigation, so communication with the other investigators on scene is important during this portion of the crime scene analysis.

Once the floor plan of the building is documented, the specific contents are recorded. You must be sure to search the room in a methodical way, which is most commonly done by walking in a circle around the room, spiraling in toward the center. Furniture, blood spatter, bodies, weapons, and any other items of interest should be included on the drawing with the distance from each item to the two reference points determined earlier. It is not necessary to draw each item. Rather, a letter or number should be assigned to each and then included in the sketch. The appearance and orientation of these items is documented in the crime scene photographs and not on the sketch. Be sure to correlate the letter or number with the photographs as well.

Any details like odors, sounds, or other facts not encompassed by the sketch should be recorded in your investigator's notebook. The level of detail should be sufficient to adequately refresh your memory if you are called to testify in court. After the scene has been properly documented, a finished sketch is prepared in a controlled environment, like back in the lab or the office. It should be a neat version of the rough sketch clearly drawn to scale. Computer programs or printed cut-and-paste kits are also used by some law enforcement agencies to generate finished sketches.

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## **EXERCISE – ROOM SKETCH**

### **MATERIALS**

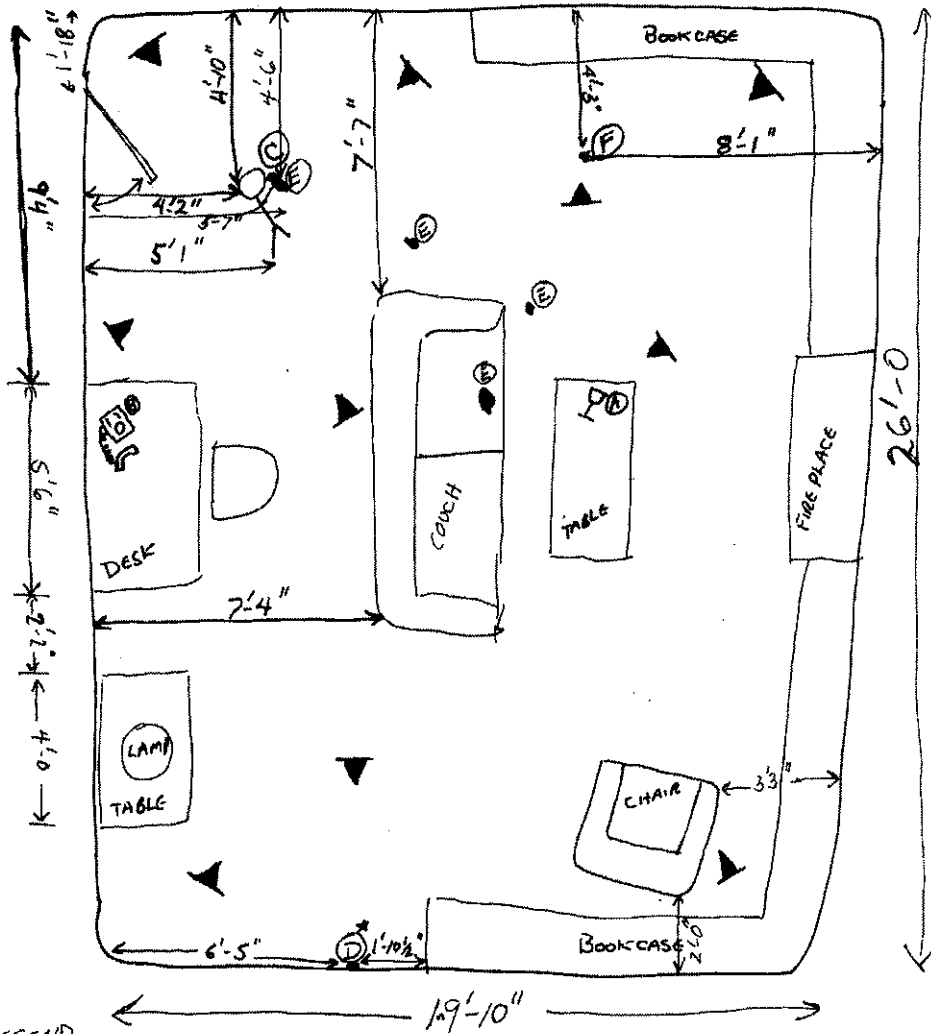
Sketch book (grid ruled)  
Pencil with eraser  
Ruler

### **PROCEDURE**

1. Generate a finished sketch from the rough sketch in figure 3-1.
2. It is necessary to draw the room to scale, meaning that the distances recorded in the rough sketch are in the same proportion in the finished sketch. This can be easily accomplished using grid-ruled or graphing paper. Most grid-ruled paper is four squares per inch. For example, if you were to draw a room that is 12 feet by 18 feet, then you can make your drawing twelve 12 by 18 squares. This is a scale of 1 foot = 1 square (or  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch). Sadly, this makes your drawing too small to be useful: only 3 inches by  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches!

CASE: 10-789-96  
 301 N. CENTRE ST.  
 OCT. 6, 1996 11:40 PM  
 HOMICIDE

VICTIM: LESTER W. BROWN  
 INVESTIGATOR: SGT. L.A. DUFFY  
 ASST BY: PTM. R.W. HICKS



LEGEND

- A = COCKTAIL GLASS
- B = TELEPHONE
- C = VICTIM
- D = BULLET HOLE
- E = BLOOD STAINS
- F = SHELL CASING
- ▲ = CAMERA LOCATIONS

\* D 3'-4 3/4" FROM FLOOR

1/4" = 1 FOOT

Figure 3-1 Rough sketch of crime scene. Courtesy of Sirchie Fingerprint Laboratories, Inc., Youngsville, NC.

